

PISHKUN, WILLOW CREEK, BENTON LAKE  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES

September 1 - December 31, 1955

REFUGE PERSONNEL

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Charlo, Montana

PISHKUN, WILLOW CREEK, BENTON LAKE  
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES  
Narrative Report  
September 1 - December 31, 1955

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I. GENERAL

- A. Weather Conditions. Following is a table showing the comparative weather data for this period over the past three years. This data is acquired from the U. S. Weather Bureau office in Choteau, Montana. While this data if not gathered from the exact refuge locations it will tend to give an indication of the weather conditions throughout this area. Choteau is approximately 15 miles North of Pishkun refuge. Willow Creek refuge is approximately seven miles South of Pishkun refuge.

<u>1955</u>	<u>Snowfall</u>	<u>Precipitation</u>	<u>Max. Temp.</u>	<u>Min. Temp.</u>
September		.13	91	29
October	3.5"	.16	78	12
November	15.0"	.79	59	-30
December	3.0"	.25	51	-23
Totals	21x5	1.33	91	-30

<u>1954</u>	<u>Snowfall</u>	<u>Precipitation</u>	<u>Max. Temp.</u>	<u>Min. Temp.</u>
September	3"	1.65	83	27
October	3"	.39	81	19
November		T	67	15
December	T	T	62	-8
Totals	6"	2.04	83	-8

<u>1953</u>	<u>Snowfall</u>	<u>Precipitation</u>	<u>Max. Temp.</u>	<u>Min. Temp.</u>
September		.36	89	28
October		.07	77	15
November	T	T	68	9
December	6"	.14	58	3
Totals	6"	.57	89	3

- B. Water Conditions. The water levels followed essentially the same general pattern throughout this period as they have during the past several years. There was a gradual decline in the water levels in both Pishkun and Willow Creek with minor fluctuations until the water was shut off from the irrigation ditches. Since the reservoirs have completely frozen over there has been no fluctuation of the water.

Following is a comparative chart showing the water levels for the period during the past several years for both Pishkun and Willow Creek.

Pishkun

End of:	1955	1954	1953	1952	1951	Mean
September	4365.9	4365.0	4356.0	4360.5	4366.0	4362.7
October	4360.3	4362.5	4362.4	4361.7	4365.9	4362.6
November	4360.3	4362.5	4363.5	4361.6	4365.8	4362.7
December	4360.2	4362.5	4363.4	4361.5	4365.8	4362.7
Mean	4361.7	4363.1	4361.4	4361.4	4365.9	

Willow Creek

End of:	1955	1954	1953	1952	1951	Mean
September	4137.6	4135.8	4136.9	4131.6	4135.7	4135.5
October	4137.8	4136.0	4136.9	4131.7	4133.2	4135.1
November	4137.8	4136.2	4137.0	4131.9	4134.0	4135.4
December	4138.0	4136.2	4137.0	4132.5	4134.8	4135.7
Mean	4137.8	4136.05	4136.95	4131.9	4134.4	

BENTON LAKE

There are no permanent water level guages at Benton Lake refuge so only a general statement can apply to this area. Water was not quite as abundant on the area this season as it has been during the past two years. Excessive evaporation and lack of rainfall made the water level recede to a rather low point. This was not particularly detrimental to the waterfowl situation as this low water left a considerable expanse of shoreline covered with emergent vegetation which the ducks and geese utilized as food. At the close of the period there was an estimated 1200 surface acres still covered with water.

One result of the low water this year was the utilization of a greater amount of forage by the cattle grazing in the refuge. Also there was hay available this season for the first time in the past three years. Needless to say this made the permittees rather pleased as Hay is a scarce commodity in this area.

## II. WILDLIFE

Very little can be reported under this heading as only two trips was made to these areas during the period. A fairly good idea as to the waterfowl numbers and conditions was obtained on both trips however. This was accomplished by the use of a Helicopter loaned by the Great Falls Air Force Base. Complete inspections were made of all three refuges early in September and also in October. In September there was an estimated 25,000 ducks and 1700 geese using Benton Lake refuge. Approximately 1500 ducks and 150 geese were observed on Willow Creek. Pishkun refuge lived up to its reputation by having less than two hundred ducks present and no geese. The predominating species of ducks observed on all three areas were Mallards and Pintails.

On Benton Lake Blue-winged Teal, Gadwall, Redheads, and Shovellers were also observed in rather limited numbers. Both Canada Geese and Snow Geese used the Benton Lake area during the period. In September when the inspection was made there was an estimated 350 Snow Geese on the area.

The only other items of interest under this heading were observed at Benton Lake where a migration of Rough-legged Hawks was observed in September. On the 10th of September the refuge Manager observed over 150 of these birds along the North and East boundaries of the refuge. The ranchers in the vicinity said this migration lasted approximately a week. Antelope continue to inhabit Benton Lake refuge in small numbers as do Mule Deer. An estimated 20 Antelope make the refuge their home and approximately a dozen deer make use of the area. One Coyote was observed in September during the flight over Benton Lake refuge. This animal was observed in the middle of a herd of cattle near the Southwest corner of refuge. Apparently this coyote was just a transient visitor moving through the area as it was not observed again.

No evidence of either Badgers or Ground Squirrels have been observed during the period.

Sharp Tailed Grouse, Hungarian Partridge, and Ring-necked Pheasants continue to be observed on Benton Lake refuge in small numbers. These birds all have a terrific struggle to maintain their status as they are subject to considerable illegal hunting pressure by people from the surrounding towns.

Food and Cover was very good for all species of wildlife present on Benton Lake refuge throughout the report period. Abundant waste grain could be found in the surrounding harvested grain fields. The geese found ample food in the newly sprouted winter grain planted near the refuge. Both grass and browse were ample for the big game present.

On Pishkun and Willow Creek refuges there was ample food and cover for the wildlife present on these areas.

### III. REFUGE DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE

No development was carried out on any of these three areas during the period. One large recognition sign was taken down and brought to Ninepipe refuge for refinishing. This was a sign which had been knocked down at Benton Lake refuge. A number of boundary markers were put up and several damaged signs were replaced at Benton Lake also.

### IV. ECONOMIC USE OF THE REFUGE

As usual there was grazing on all three areas. On Pishkun and Willow Creek refuges this use was controlled and regulated by the Greenfields Irrigation District at

Fairfield. This grazing did follow the recommendations set forth by the Fish and Wildlife Service however. At Benton Lake both Haying and grazing were carried on during the period.

A summary of the economic use on the refuge can be found on form NR-10 following this report.

Respectfully submitted.

January 11, 1956

  
Grover F. Elgan, Refuge Manager

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
John E. Schwartz, Refuge Manager

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Regional Director  
Fish and Wildlife Service  
Region One, Portland, Oregon

## HAYING AND GRAZING

Refuge.....Year 194.....

Benton Lake

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Permittee	Permit No.	Unit or Location	Actual Acreage Utilized	Animal Use Months	Tons of Hay Harvested	Period of Use From - To	Rate	Total Income	Remarks
William Neuman	BIS-110	5-C	280	168		1/1/55 12/31/55	.20	56.00	
Carl Hinderager	BIS-112	4-C	147	96		" "	.20	29.40	
Chas. Prinzing	BIS-113	3-C	280	168		" "	.20	56.00	
John Hinkle	BIS-111	2-C	1100	660		" "	.20	220.00	
John Hinkle	BIS-115	1-C	10420*	360		7/15/55-10/15/55	.75	270.00	
Carl Hinderager	BIS-116	1-C		225		" "	.75	167.75	
Chas. Hinderager	BIS-117	1-C		300		" "	.75	225.00	
Verle Ewing	BIS-118	1-C		90		" "	.75	67.00	
M. C. Hammett	23841	1-C		54		" "	.75	40.50	
O. M. Olson	23842	1-C		53		" "	.75	24.75	
Walter Prinzing	23843	1-C		75		" "	.75	56.25	
Elwin Love	23844	4-H	80		78	9/20/55-3/31/56	2.00	156.00	
Chas. Hinderager	23845	1-H, 2-H, 3-H	160		115 1/2	" "	.75	231.00	
Chas. Hinderager	23846	1-C		52.5		10/16/55-10/30/55	.75	29.36	
Carl Hinderager	23847	5-H, 6-H	160		115 1/2	9/20/55-3/31/56	2.00	231.00	
John Hinkle	23848	7-H, 8-H	160		115 1/2	" "	2.00	231.00	
O. M. Olson	23849	1-C		11		10/16/55-11/15/55	.75	8.25	
John Hinkle	23852	1-C		120		" "	.75	90.00	
Carl Hinderager	23853	1-C		100		" "	.75	75.00	
M. C. Hammett	23854	1-C		18		" "	.75	13.50	
Walter Prinzing	23855	1-C		25		" "	.75	18.75	
O. M. Olson	BIS-114	1-A	20			1/1/55-12/31/55	.50	20.00	Agriculture Permit

Totals:

Acreage grazed.....

12227

Animal use months.....

2555.5

Total income Grazing.....\$1459.03

Acreage cut for hay.....

560

Tons of hay cut.....

424.5

Total income Haying.....\$849.00

Agriculture Permit # 20.00

\$2337.03

\* This includes approx. 2000 Acres of water.